

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) In an electronic document handling system, a method of manipulating documents comprising the steps of:
generating a staple data object[[, for]] representing an association of selected pages of at least two selected documents;
generating an electronic cover sheet for the staple data object;
accepting from a user a list of at least one page of at least two electronic documents;
referencing each page or each electronic document in the list as an item of the staple data object;
accepting a staple instruction from [[a]] the user, wherein for each of the at least two selected documents, if a document is not stored in a permanent storage, the document is copied to a permanent storage to create a permanent copy of the document and the staple data object is updated to refer to the permanent copy of the document; and
cryptographically securing the combination of the pages of the at least two electronic documents of the staple data object in response to receipt of the staple instruction, thereby creating an unalterable indicator of the existence and integrity of the association of selected pages and selected documents together at one time.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of accepting a list is a step of accepting a manually input list
3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of accepting a list is a step of accepting a computer-generated list.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of presenting [[a]] the user with an online form as an aid to selecting pages or documents for association as a stack

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of prompting for the staple instruction by presenting the user with a stapler icon which, when selected, represents the staple instruction.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of copying the selected pages and selected documents in a stack to static storage.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of copying the selected pages and selected documents in a stack to a local storage device local to the electronic document handling system.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
displaying a first list of documents, wherein the first list of documents lists the documents that are selected for inclusion in an open stack;
displaying a second list of documents, wherein the second list of documents list documents that have not been selected for inclusion in an open stack; and
displaying a user interface control operative to obtain selections from a user of documents from the second list for inclusion in an open stack.

9. (Currently Amended) In an electronic document handling system, a method of associating documents comprising the steps of:
generating a stack object[[, for]] representing an association of selected pages and selected documents;
generating an electronic cover sheet for the stack object;
accepting from a user a list of at least one page of at least one electronic document;

referencing each page or each electronic document in the list as an item of the stack object;

accepting a staple instruction from a user, wherein for each of the selected pages and selected documents, if a selected page or a selected document is not stored in a permanent storage, the selected page or selected document is copied to a permanent storage to create a permanent copy of the selected page or selected document and the staple data object is updated to refer to the permanent copy of the selected page or selected document;

cryptographically securing the stack object in response to receipt of the staple instruction, thereby creating an unalterable indicator of the existence and integrity of the association of selected pages and selected documents together at one time;

opening [[a]] the secured stack object upon receipt of a stack open instruction;
presenting the contents of the secured stack object for perusal by the user;
accepting additions and deletions of items on the secured stack object; and
resecuring the secure stack upon receipt of a stack restaple operation.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of cryptographically securing the stack object in response to receipt of the staple instruction further comprises:

using a stack signature to secure the stack object, wherein the stack signature is a checksum of the contents of all of the selected pages and selected documents in the stack, signed by the digital signature of a user or the digital signature or private key of a system.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10 wherein the step of generating an electronic cover sheet for the stack object further comprises:

storing the electronic cover sheet in a stack database, where it can be referenced.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of generating an electronic cover sheet for the stack object further comprises:

generating controls for adding and deleting selected pages and selected documents from the stack.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the electronic cover sheet includes a visual indication that the existence of the association of selected pages and selected documents together at one time has been cryptographically secured by the staple data object.